



A WORLD away

For expat mums, parenting and passports go hand in hand. **TONIA ZEMEK** catches up with three Aussie women putting motherhood on the map

Living overseas can be both challenging and exciting in its own right, but with a baby on board it's an even greater adventure. Imagine navigating new protocols for pregnancy and birth, discovering local post-birth traditions, and following different social customs with your little. There's a whole world of new experiences just waiting to be explored, and here we speak to three mums who have done just that...

"We live on a farm in *Chile*"



BEKA MELVILLE moved to her husband's homeland, Chile, and says sons Samuel, four, and Diego, two, have a fantastic life there.

My partner, José, is Chilean and we met while we were both travelling through France. I'm Australian but my mum's a Kiwi, so we happened to be in New Zealand when we discovered I was pregnant with Samuel.

We contemplated staying in New Zealand or moving to Australia, but we eventually decided to relocate to Chile, where José's parents live. They offered us rent-free accommodation in a house on their cherry farm, about 20 kilometres south of the country's capital, Santiago.

I wanted to have a home birth because I believe having a baby should be as natural as possible. Unfortunately it's just not something that's done in Chile, so we ended up in a local hospital. Caesareans

are very popular over here, but I was determined to have a vaginal birth and I did.

I also had a natural vaginal birth with my youngest, Diego, but it was a far quicker delivery. It was only two hours from the first contraction to the moment he was born. My doctor described me, and my lack of pain relief, as "valiente" (Spanish for brave or valiant).

Diego's almost two and I'm still breastfeeding. The Chileans find it quite shocking. They're surprised I still have milk and often ask me why I continue. A lot of local mums go back to work pretty quickly and stop breastfeeding at around six months, as many do in Australia.

My mum flew over when Diego was born. Shortly afterwards a volcano erupted in the south of Chile. All flights were cancelled, so Mum had to extend her visit, which was awesome. Now we Skype regularly, but I do miss my family back home.

I long for the little things too. There aren't any public libraries here so I can't take the kids out to read like I would at home. Books in Chile are heavily taxed so they end up being really expensive. I want the boys to develop a love of books, so José and I have improvised with our own little library at home.

Overall the kids have a wonderful life here. The cherry farm provides an amazing backyard with 10 dogs as well as birds, horses, chickens and even a donkey.

I think learning two languages is also a big bonus for my boys. We speak English in the house and Spanish when we go out. It's effortless for my kids – their minds are sponges. Chile's great and I love that Samuel and Diego have this life. >

"Singapore is such a change of pace"



Having a live-in helper is just one of the overseas experiences BEUNCA HORN and her family have come to love.

I have four daughters – Brodie, 10, Ava, six, Darcie, four, and Jessie, one – three of whom were born here in Singapore. My husband, Andrew, is a coal trader and we moved here so he could be closer to the

mines in Indonesia. We've sure come a long way from our hometown in Newcastle!

Having had my eldest in Australia, initially I was quite frightened by the prospect of being pregnant overseas. However, the level of care and attention I received was just phenomenal. With each pregnancy I got to see my doctor fortnightly and I was scanned at every appointment. The system in Singapore is brilliant.

Shortly after having Jessie, I was keen to take part in an Asian tradition known as belly binding. Why live here all these years and not do something the local women do?

I hired a Chinese woman to come to the house to perform this ancient ritual. She rubbed a herbal paste from my breastbone to my pubic bone and then tightly wrapped my torso in a bandage. After 10 days I was relieved to remove the wrap as it was itchy and smelly, but the results were incredible. My belly was completely flat. I went on to enjoy my best recovery of all four births.

Growing up here is like one big party for my daughters. We live in a large apartment with a pool and tennis court, as well as

a huge communal play area with slippery slides and swings.

Outside the apartment we enjoy being a part of Singapore's multicultural community. The girls love dressing up in their cheongsams for Chinese New Year. They also don saris for Deepavali, the Indian Festival of Lights.

Darcie's just finished preschool at a place the size of a small university. There was even a fully functioning mini-kitchen for the children to learn how to cook!

I like preparing all the kids' meals at home, although most expats have their live-in helpers do the cooking. Our helper, Vilma, is a Filipino lady the girls call Aunty. She joined us shortly after Darcie was born. It took me a while to get over my jealousy issues, especially when Darcie and Jessie were only a few months' old and trying to figure out which one of us was mum. I soon realised the advantage of having Vilma in our lives, though. The girls can't have their Aussie relatives nearby, so Vilma is this one additional person who loves them. The girls adore her. She's part of the family.

"Switzerland works for us"



TIFFANY McKINNON says it was a risk deciding to start a family in Switzerland, but she wouldn't have it any other way.

We celebrated our wedding in Brisbane in 2007. Less than 12 months later my husband, Brett, a scientist, was transferred to the Swiss capital of Bern.

Brett works in reproductive medicine and coincidentally after moving to Switzerland I struggled with unexplained infertility. Fortunately Brett's colleagues were able to recommend a great local doctor who guided us through intrauterine insemination.

The first procedure was a success and I fell pregnant with our son, Flynn. About four months into the pregnancy, I went to the hospital to pick up all my paperwork. None of the forms came in English and I remember coming home in tears. At that stage my grasp of German was okay, but not quite up to translating medical matters.

That was my only real blip. I didn't have morning sickness or any other typical ailments, and I had an easy and drug-free delivery. To our surprise, six months after Flynn's birth, our daughter, Audrey, was conceived without any medical intervention.

Although I was ecstatic to have two healthy children, I missed not having family nearby when Audrey was born. There were days when I was exhausted but couldn't rest because Flynn was always on the go.

Luckily there are lots of mums with young families in Bern. I'm part of an expat mothers' group and every neighbourhood has a bunch of different parks, where the playgrounds are specifically designed to exercise children's minds. It's not just slides and swings. I love watching their brains tick over as they try and figure out the pulley systems to lift and dump water and sand.

Bern also has lots of indoor soft play areas that are essential, because it can snow up to six months of the year. I'd love the kids to be able to ride their bikes and run around outside, but it's just not possible during Swiss winters. The weather makes it impossible for Flynn and Audrey to have a childhood like mine. I virtually grew up at the beach and playing in the backyard.

I didn't travel till I was 21, but these kids have already been to the UK, Italy, Germany, Greece and Sweden. Flynn ate his first croissant in France! I hope that one day they'll be proud of us for taking the risk to start a family overseas. While most people think it's crazy, it's really worked for us. ★